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In its colour, in the size and form of its ears, &c. it makes a nearer approach to the *Mus longipes* of Pallas than the *Dipus Americanus* does. It is thus described by Mr. Peck, in a letter to me. "*Mus cauda elongata pilosa, palmis subpentadactylis, disco fufcescente, lateribus rufescentibus, abdomine albo; pedibus posticis longitudine corporis.*" A farther account of this and of the other species of *Dipus*, which I have discovered, I shall, probably, communicate to the Philosophical Society, at some future period.

## N°. XIII.

*A Letter from Mr. JOHN HECKEWELDER, to Dr. BARTON, giving some account of the remarkable instinct of a bird called the Nine-Killer.*

Bethlehem, December 18th 1795.

Read April  
1, 1796.

**H**AVING an opportunity by a friend of mine to Philadelphia, I must mention to you a curious fact, that came to my knowledge but yesterday.

I went to a farm, about eleven miles and a half from this place, to view a young orchard, which had been planted, about five weeks ago, under my direction, where on viewing the trees, I found, to my great astonishment, almost on every one of them, one and on some two and three grasshoppers, stuck down on the sharp thorny branches, which were not pruned when the trees were planted. I immediately called the tenant, and asked the reason and his opinion of this. He was much surprised at my ignorance about the matter, and informed me, "that these grasshoppers were stuck up by a small bird of prey, which the Germans called *Neun-toedter* (in English

English, Nine-killer); that this bird had a practice of catching and sticking up nine grasshoppers a day, and that as he well knew they did not devour the grasshoppers, nor any other insects, he thought they must do it for pleasure. I asked him for a description of this bird, and was perfectly satisfied that it lived entirely on small animals, such as small birds, mice, &c. for I had paid attention to this bird as early as the year 1761, when, in the winter, one of the same species took a favourite little bird out of my cage at the window, from which time I have watched them more closely, and have found them more numerous in the western-country than here. Not being satisfied with what the tenant had told me respecting the intention of the bird's doing all this (*viz.* for diversion sake), and particularly observing each and every one of these grasshoppers stuck up so regularly, and in their natural position as when on the ground, not one of them having its back downwards, I began to conjecture what might be the real intention which the bird had in this, and my determined opinion was, that this little bird-hawk, by instinct, made use of this art, in order to decoy the smaller birds, which feed on insects, and by these means have a fair opportunity of catching them. All this I communicated to my friends, on my return home, and they were not less astonished at what I had related to them, than I had been on discovering the fact. It being agreed that one or more gentlemen of learning and observation should more minutely examine into this matter, the proprietor of this farm, with another gentleman and myself, went this day out for the purpose, and viewing the grasshoppers on a number of these small trees (some of which we cut off, and took home), we returned to the tenant, who not only himself but also his father and sister gave us the best assurances, that they had, long since, and from time to time, observed this

bird catching grasshoppers and sticking them up in the manner already related, and that sometimes they had observed, in places where this species of bird keeps, numbers of grasshoppers stuck up on a thorn-bush in like manner. The Reverend Mr. V. Vleck is perfectly satisfied that this bird-hawk is the *Lanius Canadensis* (in Bartram\*), and has obligingly communicated the following account of this little bird-hawk to me: it is extracted from a German publication printed at Göttingen, in 1778, under the title of "Natural History for Children, by M. George Christian Paff," who after giving a description of the different species of this bird, concludes thus: "Why is this bird of prey called the nine-killer? Because it is said to have the habit of sticking beetles or other insects, and perhaps sometimes nine of them in succession, upon thorns, that they may not escape until he has leisure to devour them all at once. And for the same reason, it is sometimes called the thorn-sticker." Now by the above account, we see that it is known in Europe that this same species of birds actually does stick up insects of different kinds on thorns, &c. but it is supposed they eat them immediately after being stuck up. Here the case is quite otherwise. They remain stuck up, for we must suppose these to have been stuck up at least some weeks ago, and before the hard frosts set in. The very birds (as we suppose) that stuck them up are now on the same ground, watching the smaller birds that come out to feed, and have been seen catching the latter but a few days ago. If it were true, that this little hawk had stuck them up for himself, how

\* I do not find that Mr. Bartram has mentioned, in any part of his *Travel*, a *Lanius Canadensis*. Since the date of this letter, Mr. Heckewelder has favoured me with a well-preserved specimen of the bird-hawk. It proves to be the *Lanius Excubitor* of Linnæus, the great-shrike of Mr. Pennant. B. S. B.

long would he be feeding on one or two hundred grasshoppers? But if it be intended to seduce the smaller birds to feed on these insects, in order to have an opportunity of catching them, that number, or even one half, or less, may be a good bait all winter: and all of us, who have considered these circumstances, are firmly of opinion, that these insects thus stuck up, are to serve as a bait, &c. through the course of the winter.

You will readily excuse my being so lengthy on this subject. The matter appeared to me of too much consequence to pass over hastily. I shall be glad to hear your opinion on this subject.

I send you a few of these grasshoppers, as I cut them from the trees. They being hard and dry, most of their legs broke off in taking them home.

I am, with great respect,

Dear Sir,

Your most obedient and

Humble servant,

JOHN HECKEWELDER.

#### N°. XIV.

*An Enquiry into the Causes of the Insalubrity of flat and Marshy Situations; and directions for preventing or correcting the Effects thereof, by WILLIAM CURRIE.*

Read O.G.  
2, 1795. **T**HAT flat and marshy situations are unfavourable to health, and that intermittent and remittent fevers with bilious evacuations are particularly prevalent in such situations during the season of Autumn in temperate climates as well as within the tropics, has